



Appropriations Committee  
Public Hearing- February 21, 2017

**Testimony on the K-12 Education Budget**

Dear Chairs Sen. Osten, Sen. Formica, Rep. Walker; Ranking Member Rep. Ziobron; and members of the Appropriations Committee-

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. We are the Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents (CAUS), an association that includes the leaders of the 21 urban school districts located all across the state.

We wanted to submit this testimony to stress how critical of a moment this is, not just for Connecticut's urban schools, but also for all of Connecticut's schools and the thousands of students attending public schools, statewide.

Over the past decade, we have seen chronic and persistent budget deficits—on the state level and in our local districts. As the chief executives of our districts, we are the ones faced with making the difficult decisions—which programs to prioritize, which staff positions to cut, which activities to eliminate—that impact our students every day. As urban educators, oftentimes these decisions come at the expense of the kids who need it the most.

After nearly ten years of deficits, we are out of options. There are no more line items to trim or non-essential programs to eliminate. We've made all the cuts that we can make without putting the educational experience of our students in serious jeopardy.

CAUS respectfully urges this Committee to remain strongly in support of funding our state's public schools, despite the pending budget deficit. We know that we will continue to have to make tough choices locally, and are prepared to do so, but we need partnership from our state leaders to ensure that funds for our most needy students will be protected. In recent years, the legislature has enacted significant policy reforms to improve the quality of education our students receive. We are finally starting to see the results of this work and recognize meaningful growth in outcomes. To reduce the state's commitment to education funding at this time would reverse these positive trends and undo much of this hard work.

In light of the recent CCJEF ruling, we know that this Committee is also likely to consider making changes to how we fund our public schools. In the governor's budget, he contemplated changes to school funding that are a step in the right direction, but don't go far enough to ensure fairness for kids.

We appreciated the change in calculation of how we count the number of kids in poverty (from Free & Reduced Price Lunch recipients to Husky A recipients), as it is a more accurate measure. However, we cannot stop here—we must find ways for the funding formula to reflect the other kinds of learning needs that our students have and that should trigger additional funding. In the urban school districts, an important example of this is funding the learning needs of English Language Learners. It takes more resources to educate ELL students, and our districts educate many more ELL students than do other districts—consideration of this and other learning needs in the school funding formula is the only way to ensure fairness and protect core services for our most needy students.

As the school funding conversation evolves throughout this session and beyond, CAUS and its members would like to offer us as a resource to this Committee. We would be happy to share our unique perspective as leaders of the state's urban school districts as you consider the best way to move forward with a change to the funding formula, and would be grateful for the chance to continue being advocates for our students.

We thank this Committee and its leaders for its hard work—we know that you are not facing an easy task this year. As district leaders, we are empathetic to the types of tough budgetary choices you are facing right now, but we strongly ask that you do not balance the budget on the backs of our state's public school students. They need us to stand up, together, and give them access to a great education and to prepare them for the future they deserve.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sal Pascarella, Danbury, CAUS Co-Chair  
Mark Benigni, Meriden, CAUS Co-Chair  
James Thompson, Bloomfield  
Aresta Johnson, Bridgeport  
Ellen Solek, Bristol  
Nivea Torres, Connecticut Technical High School System  
Nathan Quesnel, East Hartford  
Jody Ian Goeler, Hamden  
Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Hartford  
Matt Geary, Manchester  
Patricia Charles, Middletown  
Nancy Sarra, New Britain  
Reginald Mayo, New Haven  
Manuel Rivera, New London  
Steve Adamowski, Norwalk  
Abby Dolliver, Norwich  
Earl Kim, Stamford  
Janet Robinson, Stratford  
Kathleen Ouellette, Waterbury  
Neil Cavallaro, West Haven  
Patricia Garcia, Windham